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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended for teachers interested in helping preschool and kindergarten children make discoveries about the reading process. The guide focuses specifically on ways teachers can build written words into children's dramatic play through the use of symbolic props-materials which either contain written words or invite children to create their own. Five settings for dramatic play (house, restaurant, beauty or barber shop, fire station and doctor's office) are described, along with suggestions about equipment, materials, experiences and symbolic props which might be used in each setting. Also discussed: how children learn, how teachers can intervene in children's play, how dramatic play relates to other aspects of the preschool and kindergarten program. (MS)

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USING SYMBOLIC PROPS IN PLAY: A CURRICULUM GUIDE AND DISCUSSION FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

Judith Schickedanz
Boston University
June, 1977

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PREFACE

This guide describes how written words can be made accessible to young children in their dramatic play. It is intended for teachers who are interested in helping preschool and kindergarten children make discoveries about the reading process.

The guide focuses specifically on ways teachers can build written words into children's dramatic play. These are introduced into children's dramatic play through the use of symbolic props. These are materials that either contain written words, or invite children to create their own. The props are consistent with the theme of the play, and they support it. Children do not interact with the props in order to read; they read the props in order to play.

In this guide, teachers will find information about (1) how children learn, (2) how materials, equipment and experiences can be used to initiate and sustain many kinds of dramatic play, (3) how teachers can intervene in children's play, (4) how children respond to symbolic props, and (5) how dramatic play relates to other aspects of the preschool and kindergarten program.

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There are many people who have influenced and inspired the thoughts that are written in this guide. Those who have been particularly influential include Professor Queenie B. Mills, Director of the University of Illinois Child Development Nursery School; Colleen King, a former teacher in the same school; and Professors J. McV. Hunt, Cecelia Lavatelli, Dolores Durkin, Bernard Spodek and Lillian Katz, all associated with the University of Illinois College of Education when I studied there.

There have been young children, too, from whom I have learned a great deal. At first, these were children that I taught; later, they were children taught by others. I am also indebted, therefore, to the schools and teachers in many areas of the country who have allowed me to watch, listen to, and even play with their children.

Reading and Preschool Education

Play is a widely acknowledged and accepted component of educational programs for preschool children. Reading, however, is not. There is, perhaps, no better way to initiate a heated debate than to suggest to early childhood educators that reading can or should be taught to preschool children.

History is one source of explanations for the early childhood educator's aversion to reading. Programs for preschool children have, in large part, been based on developmental considerations. Arnold Gesell (1880-1969), a physician who had a tremendous impact on early childhood education in this country, began his work in the 1920's and 30's at the same time that nursery schools began to appear (Braun, 1972). Gesell collected voluminous amounts of data to answer the question: "How are age and behavior related?" Norms, or behaviors attached to various ages, were the products of his research (Gesell, 1940; Gesell and Ilg, 1946). It became popular to think of certain behaviors as being appropriate only for particular ages. Time was the explanation for the emergence of behavior; when a behavior did not emerge at the expected (i.e., normative) time, then additional time was thought to insure its appearance. Early childhood educators who hold this theoretical orientation are likely to claim that children are not ready for reading; the implication being that time, rather than reading experiences is what is needed to get them ready.

Today, maturation is usually not the only, or the complete

explanation given for behavior change. Much evidence suggests that experience, too, makes a difference (Hunt, 1966). However, this change in views about the causes of behavior has not resulted in widespread changes in views about the appropriateness of reading instruction in the preschool. One of the reasons it has not may be related to the kind of experiences preschool teachers think people are talking about when the term "reading" is used. They think people mean highly prescribed, total-group, teacher-directed, skills instruction on alphabet recognition and phonics.

Preschool teachers' views about what other people mean by "reading instruction" are not without foundation in fact. They have seen the publishers' reading kits and workbooks, and they have seen a fair share of first-grade classrooms. And, for the most part, they have failed to see reading materials or practices that are consistent with their views about how children learn, and what makes children want to learn.

So strong is the belief among early childhood educators that "reading instruction" means drill on skills, that they hesitate to use the term, reading, to describe actual reading experiences that they, in fact, often do provide. For example, in an article about a preschool play program, the word, reading, is not used to describe learnings that are usually considered to be reading:

> Inherent in this play, assuming some intervention by the teacher, are opportunities for the development of science, math, geography, and social studies concepts; opportunities to engage in mapping arrangements, sign making, recognition of symbols and words; and opportunities to enrich language and thought processes (Anker et.al., 1974).

The words "science," "math," "geography," and "social science" are used, but the word "reading" is not.

When teaching reading to preschoolers is discussed by early childhood educators, it is often played down, or said to be unimportant. For example, in a rather recent issue of Young Children, the authors of an article about teaching reading to preschoolers made several statements that are very revealing:

> We do not have as one of our goals that children learn to read in our preschool...
>
> We believe that one reason why so many of our children learned to read at ages four and five is that we really don't care if they do or not, as paradoxical as that may seem (Sanberg and Pohlman, 1976).

Obviously, the authors valued reading a great deal; otherwise, they would not have included reading experiences in their program. And, despite what they said, they obviously did care if children learned to read. It should be obvious, too, that the children learned to read, not because their teachers didn't care if they did, but because their teachers cared enough to provide many good experiences that made it possible for children to learn to read.

I wonder if the authors were trying to say that no child was forced to learn to read, and certainly no child was expected to learn in the same way as any other child. And, I wonder if the authors were also trying to say that considerations of the total child must always influence the extent to which any goal is given high priority for that child. And, I wonder if they were trying to say, too, that reading isn't the goal of learning to read anyway: becoming more

competent in doing things is the goal for helping children learn any skill. Therefore, the question asked in evaluating a child's progress in this preschool program would surely not have been: "Is the child reading?" but "How is the child solving problems, mastering situations, and coping with his or her ever-widening world?" Perhaps it was not so much that the authors of this article cared little about reading, but that they wanted to make it very clear that they cared about many other things too.

It may be, then, that today's early childhood educator objects to reading instruction in the preschool, not because he or she thinks children are not ready, or that behavior will develop automatically in due time without any experience, but because reading instruction as it is commonly practiced in the elementary school is not consistent with preschool teachers' knowledge about how children learn, or with their values about what is important for children to learn. A rather curious situation results: Even when a great deal of reading instruction occurs in the preschool, it is rarely called "reading," and teachers deny that they value learning to read as a goal for the children they teach. It might be more productive for early childhood educators to simply say, "Yes, we teach reading; this is how we do it, and why we do it this way."

Using Symbolic Props in Dramatic Play

The purpose of this curriculum guide is to describe for preschool teachers how reading experiences can be incorporated into children's dramatic play. Dramatic play may not seem like a suitable place to introduce reading experiences into the preschool program; dramatic play is the activity viewed more sacred and off-limits to teacher-interruption than perhaps any other. Therefore, before we proceed with answering

the question of how to incorporate reading experiences into dramatic play, we must spend some time answering the question: "Why provide reading experiences in dramatic play?"

Children and dramatic play. Most children engage in dramatic play. While there is variation in how children play, it is still quite accurate to say that dramatic play is a behavior that is universal among children (Smilansky, 1971). This writer has been struck over and over again throughout more than 12 years of work in preschool and kindergarten settings with the strength of children's tendency to engage in dramatic play. Dramatic play seems to be a "natural," or preferred mode of operation for the preschool child.

Children appear willing and interested in playing out all kinds of behavior. In fact, it seems that children play out whatever they know about their own and adults' activities. The children's own knowledge of roles, and the availability of props for use in play, are probably the two most important factors that determine exactly what children will play. Given stethoscopes and old white shirts, children almost always play doctor and nurse, if they are familiar with these roles. Given dishes and dolls, children almost always play house. And, given old food cartons, paper bags, play money and a cash register, they will usually play store.

When the props provided for a role include reading and writing materials, then children play with these, too. It is interesting to note here that Durkin (1966) found that many of the children in her study of early readers played school with an older sibling. The two necessary ingredients for playing school, knowledge of the teacher's role and availability of school-related props, were provided by

the older sibling.

In the case of playing school, the props are almost exclusively what I call symbolic props, or materials that either contain words, or invite children to create their own. But symbolic props are appropriate in almost all kinds of dramatic play, not just school play, though teachers rarely include them. It is as if teachers feel that children would not be interested in using them, or would be unable to use them because they cannot yet actually read and write. If this is the reason, then we have a rather curious situation. When preschool children are given paint, it is expected that they will not at first paint "pictures" that resemble our own. We call what they do "painting," nonetheless, and we wouldn't dream of taking the paint away. Similarly, blocks are given to children to use for building things, and it is expected that their first buildings will not look like buildings that we would build: Theirs will be without windows and doors, and many will fall down. But we wouldn't think of saying the children do not "understand" blocks, and we wouldn't dream of taking the blocks away.

Furthermore, children lack a complete understanding of the social relationships they try to portray in their play, and they understand little about the function and mechanics of many of the non-symbolic props they play with. Again, however, we would not think of denying children opportunities to play with these things. On the contrary, we assume that children learn about these things by being allowed to have active contact with them. It makes little sense, then, or at least it is inconsistent, to exclude symbolic props because children do not "understand" them.

Perhaps there is another reason why teachers exclude symbolic props: Perhaps teachers think that reading and writing props will "ruin" children's play. This could occur if teachers were more interested in teaching reading and writing than in supporting children's play. Obviously, the play could, and probably would be ruined in this case. But this does not seem to be a sufficient reason for excluding symbolic props. Poor teaching can ruin any kind of play, with any kind of props. A lack of sensitivity and respect for children's play, and a lack of knowledge about how to intervene at appropriate times, can occur just as frequently with play that does not include symbolic props as with play that does include them.

A second reason why teachers may feel that symbolic props will ruin children's play is that they view reading and writing as basically alien to the young child. They feel that reading and writing are not activities that children would want to do, or would choose to do, or would do "naturally." Therefore, so as not to dampen children's play, symbolic props are excluded, and only props that children are thought to enjoy are included.

No doubt, many children, especially those with some experience in the elementary grades, shun reading and writing materials. We must remember, however, that such children have had time to learn to view these materials as alien to their interests. Such observations do not necessarily indicate that younger children, who have not yet had unpleasant experiences with reading and writing materials, will respond in the same way. And, if this writer's observations of preschool children's responses to symbolic props are indicative of the responses of preschool children in general, then this concern

has no basis in fact. Preschool children seem to show as much interest in and curiosity about symbolic props as they show for non-symbolic props.

One set of reasons, then, for including reading experiences in dramatic play is based on the fact that dramatic play is a preferred and interesting mode of operation for most preschool children. In addition, symbolic props seem no different in any significant way, except in terms of content, from the typical props already commonly provided by teachers for children's play.

Dramatic play, "real" reading and how children learn. A second set of reasons why dramatic play was selected as a way to provide reading experiences for preschoolers has to do with how children learn. Dramatic play provides repeated opportunities for children to interact with real reading materials. Real reading materials, as opposed to materials that focus on isolated skills (adults' abstractions from reading materials), provide the complex raw data from which children can build schemes, to borrow a Piagetian term (Piaget, 1963), to represent the regularities (i.e., rules) that govern letter-sound correspondence. An understanding of such rules is an essential aspect of learning to read. In other words, part of learning to read involves "breaking the code."

The evidence that children who learn to read with ease are children who have been read to a great deal by their parents (Durkin, 1966; Miller, 1977; Sakamoto, 1977; Sutton, 1964), suggests that in order to develop reading skills (i.e., technical skills of breaking the code) children need access to actual reading material.

Young children insist on hearing favorite stories over and over again. This repetition provides them with the verbal scheme

of the story that they can later match with their written scheme of the same story. Comparison of the two schemes allows them to abstract rules about letter-phoneme correspondence (probably not deliberately or consciously, at least at first).

A child would not develop such schemes quickly. There is much to learn at first just about how a book works--where to start looking at it, where to look at each page, which marks are pictures as opposed to print, and so on. These understandings, no doubt, depend on many observations of adults in the process of "making books work," as well as on comments made by adults such as: "Where is the doggy?" or "That word says 'red'." or "Where does it say THE END?"

When children have mastered all of these preliminary learnings, and also know a story by heart, they have a way to read a story to themselves. We often say children are not really reading the book in this case; that they know the story instead. This is true, of course, but children probably learn something about reading from these experiences. The experiences provide children with opportunities to abstract reading rules or schemes for themselves. Language experience stories, and signs and labels for familiar things do too, and it is these latter activities, as well as books, that become incorporated into dramatic play through the use of symbolic props.

Viewing learning to read as a process of hypothesis or rule-generation is consistent with general views of learning held by cognitively-oriented psychologists, most notably, Piaget (Inhelder and Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1963). It is consistent, too, with the views of many psycholinguists regarding how young children acquire language (Brown, 1973; McNeill,

1966; Menyuk, 1971). With regard to reading research, however, the questions have often been, "Does conservation of number, or classification predict success in reading?" or "What are the conservation, classification and seriation tasks in reading?" or "How much progress in language is required before reading instruction can begin (Dimitrovsky and Almy, 1975; Goodman and Burke, 1976)?" These, of course, are important questions, but it might be useful to also ask questions such as: "What does the way children learn language, or learn to classify, seriate and conserve tell us about how children learn?" or "What is the counterpart in reading to the two-word utterance in language, or Stage Two in the development of conservation of number?"

As far as I know, these latter questions have not been asked or answered. Therefore, dramatic play was not selected as a vehicle for providing reading experiences because there is empirical support for the notion that children who learn to read do so by building schemes of real reading materials which they then use to abstract rules about reading, but because this notion is theoretically consistent with the way children seem to learn other things, and because there seems to be no good reason to assume that children are different kinds of learners when they learn to read than when they learn to do anything else.

With all of this as background, we are ready now to turn our attention to how a teacher can provide reading experiences through dramatic play. The "how" question is answered in a variety of ways: (1) through lists of items that can serve as props to support dramatic play, (2) through anecdotes from teachers who have used symbolic props (these anecdotes are sometimes composites of anecdotes from several teachers), and (3) through questions and answers about practical

considerations related to implementing dramatic play in the preschool setting.

SETTING I

HOUSE PLAY

Materials Commonly Provided for House Play

1. Kitchen furniture including a stove, sink, refrigerator, table and chairs and storage shelves.
2. Tablecloth or place mats.
3. Small chest of drawers and doll bed.
4. Artificial flowers.
5. Several dolls and stuffed animals.
6. Dolls' clothes, blankets and bottles.
7. Old adult clothes for children to dress-up in, including hats, gloves, jackets, neckties, scarves, jewelry, etc.
8. An assortment of dishes, silverware, pots and pans, and cooking utensils (e.g. cookie cutters, wooden spoons, wire wisks, etc.).
9. Plastic replicas of fruits and vegetables.
10. Empty containers from food, cleaning products and toiletry items such as baby powder.
11. Dustpan and small broom.
12. Telephones.
13. Brown paper bags or plastic net bags to use for "shopping" or "picnicking."
14. Container of non-sticky playdough.

Suggestions for Using Symbolic Props in House Play

1. Place empty food containers in the house area. Children can bring these from home or the teacher can bring them. The words on the containers provide opportunities for children to "read."

2. Post recipe charts used in previous cooking projects on the wall of the house area. Children will often use these in their pretend cooking, especially if empty containers for the ingredients needed in the recipes are also available.

3. Write down recipes used in previous cooking projects. Collect these together in a tagboard "cookbook" and place it in the house area. Children will use it in their pretend cooking.

4. Write the children's names and telephone numbers on tagboard pages to make a telephone book. Place it in the house area near the telephone. Add other pages with numbers for important places such as the fire or police stations. If firehats and short pieces of hose are available in a block area, play between the house and fire house can develop, and children can use the phone book to find the fire house number.

5. Place paper, pencils and envelopes in the house area. Children can "write" lists for items needed in the grocery store, or they can "write" letters to friends. A mailbox outside the house play area can encourage letter-writing, and a mail carrier's hat and bag can encourage someone to play mail carrier.

6. Place books in the house area so that children can read alone, to each other, or to their dolls.

7. Hang a plaque with an appropriate saying or poem on the wall in the house area. "Home Sweet Home" would be an example of a good one.

House Play Anecdotes from Teachers

1. The children did not do anything the first few days with the pencils and paper I placed in the house area. Then one day, when about five children were in the house, one child announced that she was baking a birthday cake for a party. Someone else picked up the can of pencils and some paper and told everyone that they must make birthday cards to let everyone know there was going to be a party. I stepped in and asked if they were going to make invitations, and they said yes.

   They began to ask me how to spell "Happy Birthday". I wrote the words out on several pieces of paper and gave these to the children to copy. Several children needed help in forming the letters. I couldn't help everyone at once, but they waited patiently for turns. It must have taken at least ten minutes for everyone to finish making an invitation.

   When they had finished, someone announced that the party was starting. The table was set, and the pretend cake was served. When I asked whose birthday it was, they said it was mine, and they sang "Happy Birthday" to me. Soon after, one of the children asked for everyone's "ticket," and the invitations they had made earlier were collected. I apologized for not having one, and the children assured me that it was okay because it was my birthday. I was grateful for their generosity, and somewhat amused about their apparent confusion concerning birthday cards, invitations, and tickets.

We "ate" our cake in a flash, and someone announced that the party was over. No one was allowed to leave, however, until the child who had collected the "tickets" passed them back again.

I was struck with how much these simple props of paper and pencils had added to the children's play. The invitations were so important to them that they spent more time making them (i.e. writing the words) than in actually having the party itself. It was interesting, too, that the invitations had such status, that they were used to regulate the party's beginning and ending.

I noticed that the children held onto their invitations after the party was over. Some children tucked them away in their pockets; others put them in their cubbies. These were now treasures to be taken home. I hoped that someone there would ask about the invitations so that the child would be able to read those words again and tell about the party, and thus, continue the learning. I made a mental note to myself to include some tips to parents in the next newsletter that would give them ideas for how to pick up on this kind of cue from their children. I made two other notes for myself: 1) I'll try to encourage children to make birthday cards for each other when it's someone's birthday, and 2) I'll try to involve children in making, buying, and selling tickets for the pretend rides they take on the bus they build with blocks from time to time.

2. Several children were playing house in the house area, and I noticed that they were looking at books that we usually keep in the library corner. I have a rule that books must stay in the library area because I've found that they become very tattered and torn if they are taken to other parts of the room. I went to the house area thinking I would remind the children of the rule, and ask them to return the books to the library.

When I entered the house area, however, I noticed that the children were reading the books to their dolls. This was such a clever and constructive idea that I hesitated to interfere and insist on the rule. But I have few rules, and I know it is important to enforce these consistently, so I tried desperately to think of a good way to solve my dilemma.

It occurred to me that we could all go on a pretend trip to the library corner and take the dolls with us. This suggestion was received with great enthusiasm by the children so we all marched off, with books in hand, to the library. And there, I read to the children and their dolls.

After a while, I suggested that the babies might be tired and need to go home to take a nap. So we all went back to the house again, and put the dolls to bed. Then I suggested that we make something to surprise the dolls with when they woke up. My idea, of course, was that the children could make small story books to read to their dolls in the house area.

Several of the children thought it was a great idea, and they got the necessary paper, crayons, and pencils. They drew pictures and told the story, and I wrote the words. Then we woke the dolls up, and read the stories to them.

I suggested that the children leave the books in the house area to read to the dolls on other days, but they insisted on taking them home to read to the dolls there. I guess we'll have to make more to use here.

3. I noticed one day that children often fed their dolls with spoons. I decided to bring empty baby food jars for the house play area for children to use in their play. I left the labels on the jars. There were empty jars from pears, peaches, peas, beef, pudding, and so on. The children found the jars quickly, and indeed, incorporated them into their play. Feeding the dolls with spoons now included dipping the spoons into the jars. But the children seemed indiscriminate in their selection of a jar to use.

I decided to join their play myself to feed a doll in order to model reading the jar labels. I knocked at the entrance to the house and asked if I could come in to play. The children said I could. The dolls were not being fed when I entered. The children were busy setting the table and cooking for a meal they intended for themselves. After a few minutes, I said I heard

the baby crying, and asked if I could feed it. No one seemed to object, so I proceeded to do this.

I lingered while selecting the food, and I picked up each baby food jar in turn to read its label. "Does the baby like peaches?" I asked. "Does the baby like beef?" Soon, I was joined by two children who came over to help me select food for the baby. "What's this kind?" they asked. "And what is this?" Together, we made a selection, and I followed through with feeding the doll.

After this demonstration, I noticed that some of the children looked at the labels on the jars when they selected one to feed the baby. Sometimes when I asked what they were feeding the doll, they told me correctly what the label said.

Later, I brought in more empty baby food jars with labels on them and I asked some children to help me select a few new kinds for their babies. They were quite accurate in their judgments about the kinds we did and did not already have, and they seemed to attend to the food names printed on the labels.

My idea, of course, was that children would want a particular kind of food to feed their baby and that this would cause them to look at the labels. Many children did, in fact, do this, but one child had her own reasons for ignoring the labels. I asked her one day, while she was feeding the doll, what kind of food

she had selected. She shrugged her shoulders and said she didn't know. I was just about to tell her that the jar label said "peaches" when she continued her response to my question: "It doesn't matter what kind it is," she said. "Babies have to learn to eat everything!"

"That's right," I said. " And your baby will surely like peaches."

SETTING II

RESTAURANT PLAY

Materials Commonly Provided to Support Restaurant Play

1. A table and chairs.
2. Simple food items and equipment and utensils needed to prepare the foods for eating.
3. Paper plates, forks, spoons, napkins, straws, and any other items needed in eating the foods.
4. Table cloths (these can be "made" out of newspapers).
5. Dress-up clothes such as chefs' hats and old shirts for waiter and waitress uniforms.
6. Small trays for serving food. These might be made from heavy cardboard.
7. Wastebasket for food scraps, used plates, napkins, etc.
8. A small broom and dustpan.
9. Wet cloths or sponges for wiping the table.
10. A source of water to wash dishes, cooking utensils, hands, etc.

Suggestions for Using Symbolic Props in Restaurant Play

1. OPEN and CLOSED signs to post at the restaurant entrance.
2. Magnetic board and magnetic letters to make a menu sign to place outside the restaurant where prospective customers can see it.
3. Individual paper menus for use by customers in ordering at the table.
4. Pencils and small pad of paper for waiters and waitresses to write orders on.
5. Recipe charts to use in "cooking" the food that is served in the restaurant. A few recipes could be written down in a restaurant "cookbook."

Restaurant Play Anecdotes from Teachers

1. I began to prepare the children for restaurant play several weeks before we actually set one up in our classroom. The first thing I did was take small groups of children to a nearby ice-cream shop so they could see first-hand what a restaurant was like. Most, if not all of the children, had, of course, been to restaurants with their parents many times before, but this class experience would give me the opportunity to help them notice specific aspects of a restaurant setting that may have escaped their attention previously.

   I took just five children at a time. In order to avoid the inevitable expression of concern the first day by children who were not going, I listed all the children's names on a large piece of paper. I drew marks between names so that only five names were grouped together. Then beside each group, I wrote the name for the day of the week that this group would go to the ice-cream store: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. I would use Friday to take anyone who had missed his or her turn on any of the other days.

   The waitress's reaction to the first group was interesting. She came to the table and handed a menu to me, but none to the children. She, no doubt, could tell that they were only four years old and probably could not read. "The children would like menus," I said, and although she looked somewhat startled, she followed through.

The menus had pictures as well as words in them, and the children comprehended these well. I had to stress that we were only having ice-cream; not sundaes, sodas, parfaits, and so on. I pointed to the section where the flavors of ice-cream were listed, and told the children the waitress would ask each one of them what kind of ice-cream they wanted.

The waitress returned soon to take our order. She looked at me, and I gave her my order. She looked at me again, as if waiting for me to tell her what the children would have. "They'll tell you what they want," I said. "And make these separate checks." I wanted to suggest that she print their checks so they might possibly read them, but I decided not to make the request.

The waitress took each child's order, and then she left the table. When she had gone, I asked if anyone knew what we call a person who works in a restaurant and asks us what we want to eat. Someone knew, and we discussed "waiter" and "waitress" for a minute. Then I asked how they think a waiter or waitress remembers what so many people want to eat. No one had a good answer to this question. "They just can," one child said. I suggested that perhaps they can because they write the orders down on paper and read them later, but no one seemed very interested in this information.

Our ice-cream came, and with it the checks - all in a pile on the table by my dish. I passed them out to each child in turn, reading them as I did: "Chocolate ice-cream; who had chocolate? Vanilla?"

After we finished eating, I showed each child where to look on the check to see how much money we would need to pay the cashier. I gave each child the exact change. That created a problem: the children thought the cashier should give some money to them. They did not understand that the cashier returns money only when the customer has paid too much.

I took each group to the restaurant in turn, one group each day of the week. On each day following a trip, I tried to involve at least one child from the group in helping me write a story chart about our trip. We talked at first about where we went and what we did, and who ate which kind of ice-cream. Usually, we wrote down what each child had to eat. The charts read something like this:

Our Trip To The Ice Cream Shop

Yesterday, we took a long walk to the ice-cream store.
I had chocolate ice cream. (Erik)
Sara had chocolate ice cream.
Jose had vanilla ice cream with sprinkles all over it.
Trisha had strawberry ice cream.
Mrs. Brown had butter pecan ice cream.

Questions such as, "Who else went with us to the ice cream shop?" helped children compose the story chart.

When a chart was finished, we taped it on the wall in the classroom, and each day, the next chart went up beside it. We read these at group time every day, and counted how many children had eaten chocolate ice cream, vanilla ice cream, and so on. Those who had not yet been to the ice cream store, talked about what they would order when it was their turn to go.

At the beginning of the next week, I made a sign that said RESTAURANT, and I placed it at the entrance to the house area. I put a chef's hat and aprons with the dress-up clothes, and placed pads of paper and pencils on top of a low shelving unit. I placed a toy cashier at the other end of the shelving unit, near the entrance.

When children went into the house area to play, they found the new playthings. I observed from afar, waiting to see if they would incorporate the new props into house play, or if the house would become a restaurant. When one child said to another, "Sit down and we'll ask you what you want," I knew it had become a restaurant.

Over the next few weeks, the children played restaurant often, and they served real foods including carrot sticks, raisins, cheese and crackers and celery stuffed with peanut butter.

We stopped having our scheduled snack at snack time for the duration of the restaurant play: We all made sure we visited the restaurant during the morning instead. We made illustrated menus, CLOSED and OPEN signs, and a cookbook that contained recipes for all the foods we prepared.

Each child played waiter or waitress a little differently from every other child. Some made scribbles on the note pads when they took customer's orders. Others asked how to spell "raisins" or "carrot sticks," and they struggled to write the words. Still others tore off blank pieces of paper and just gave these to the customers, apparently not understanding at all the purpose these papers were to serve.

Some children "read" the menus quite well. We made five different sets in all; one for each of the five specialties served in the restaurant. Because only one was served each day, the restaurant workers had to find the set of menus that matched the food being served. The illustrations (e.g. drawings, magazine pictures) helped here.

The variation in the way children played with the symbolic props--the gross outlines of ideas rather than exact detail--was similar to children's play with other props. I often notice that children say they are "baking" while they make pretend stirring motions with a spoon in a saucepan on top of the stove. Clothes are put on backwards, or wrongside out, or they are

buttoned unevenly. Dishes are "washed" and then put away without being rinsed. These indicate the kinds of experiences that might be planned for outside the play setting, but these "errors" or approximations do not impede children's play at all, and should not be worried about, or corrected during the play itself, it seems to me.

At the end of a few weeks, we took the restaurant play props out of the house area. The children needed a place to play house again, and the weather was now good enough to set up a lemonade stand outdoors during outdoor play. This would allow the restaurant play to continue, but in a different way.

2. One day, we decided to prop our magnetic board on a small chair and place it near the entrance to the restaurant. We placed magnetic letters beside it, in a small box. The idea was that children would use the magnetic board and letters to make a menu sign. "Customers" could then see what the restaurant was serving that day.

Children did, in fact, use the magnetic board and letters several days in a row to make a menu sign. It was interesting to see them use the table menus to find out the letters that they would need to spell the words. But one day, there was an argument in the restaurant, and when I went to explore its cause, I learned that one child had taken the magnetic letters, placed them in

a saucepan, and was pretending to cook alphabet soup! Few letters remained for making the menu sign, and the restaurant players were protesting.

I helped them settle the dispute by suggesting that the child making the soup give just those letters needed to make the name of the food being served that day back to the restaurant players. She did, and both kinds of play were able to continue, side-by-side.

SETTING III

BEAUTY OR BARBER SHOP PLAY

Materials Commonly Included for Beauty or Barber Shop Play

1. A table for barber or beautician to place needed materials on.
2. A chair(s) for the customer(s).
3. A kitchen sink unit like those used in house play.
4. Pieces of cloth or towels to place around customer's necks, or to use as towels. Pincer clothespin to secure towel ends.
5. Several combs, and plastic containers to store these in.
6. Dish of soap solution for dirty combs.
7. A hand mirror, and an up-right mirror.
8. Hair rollers, barrettes, hair pins.
9. Empty hair products containers (e.g. shampoo, hair spray).
10. Plastic razor.
11. Small water-color brush and dish of water to use in "manicures."
12. A telephone.

Symbolic Props to Use in Beauty or Barber Shop Play

1. Post signs that say BEAUTY SHOP or BARBER SHOP.
2. Make OPEN and CLOSED signs to hang at the entrance.
3. Post price lists on walls:

SHAMPOO	$3.00
HAIR CUT	$4.00
SHAVE	$2.00

4. Place pictures of men and women with different hair styles on a wall in the beauty and barber shop areas. Label the pictures according to the hair styles shown.

5. Label containers "rollers," "combs," "dirty combs" and so on.

6. Make an appointment book.

7. Place books and magazines in the area for waiting customers to read.

Beauty and Barbershop Play - Anecdotes from Teachers

1. The interactions with the appointment book were some of the most interesting ones to watch. When we took a trip to the beauty shop near the school before we opened our own, the appointment book was one item that the children saw. The proprietor of the shop explained that it was important to have an appointment before arriving at the shop to have one's hair done, and that customers either make an appointment by telephone, or make one while they are in the shop on an earlier visit.

   Invariably, in their play, the children signed the appointment book when they arrived at the shop to have their hair done. They seemed to know that it was important to have their name in the book, but they didn't really understood that the timing of getting it there was important.

   Their use of the book makes perfectly good sense to me, though, in terms of what I know about four-year-olds' understandings of time: The "proper" use of an appointment book would require an understanding of concepts such as before and after. I know they know what these words mean in familiar situations. If I would ask them, for example, what we do before nap, I think most would say that we eat lunch. Or, if I asked what we do after story time, most would say we go to the gym. But when it comes to thinking and planning ahead, and organizing events using a framework of before and after, I wonder if that isn't

still too difficult for them.

Regardless, though, they had a good time with the appointment book. I took it to our group meeting so we could read the names, and discuss who had been to the beauty or barber shop on that day.

The writing was not the best, but we had no difficulty figuring out whose name was whose. I wasn't the least bit concerned that some children made letters backwards, or wrote in large scrawls clear across a page and then divided up their name to finish it on another line, or, vertically, down the edge of the paper. The children had opportunities to see their names written accurately in many places, and they saw print go on a page frequently when I took down their dictation, either individually, or in a group.

The appointment book was not the place to make a point about writing things "right." It provided a time and a place for children to pretend that they were the best writers ever, and for them to discover how writing is used in everyday life. These feelings of confidence and self-worth, and this knowledge of the usefulness and purpose of a skill, provided the motivation that helped children stick with the hard and tedious task of really learning to write. For example, one day, a child chose to practice writing her name. Paper and pencils were always

available to the children for use in drawing or writing. On this particular day, this child insisted that I help her "learn to make her name." Her name was Beth, and she could form all of the letters except the "e." She was attempting to write all but the "B" in lower case, and this was a new task for her; one she set for herself, by the way.

She repeatedly asked me to show her how to form the "e." Each time I made one, she tried to make one, too. She worked for over half an hour, and in the end, was making a rather well-formed "e."

What interested me most was her conversation during the practice session. It included the following comments:
"When you grow up, you get to write all the time, if you know how."
"When I know how to write, I can write letters to my Grandmother all by myself."
"My sister knows how to write, and when I'm big, I'll know how too."

In play, children can pretend they are already big, and know how to do these things. The process not only helps them cope with the waiting, but provides a way for them to come to know those things they aspire to.

2. We ran into difficulties the first few days because everyone wanted to play barber, beautician or customer. There were

not enough materials available to employ multiple barbers and beauticians, so it was necessary to try to think of a way to include more children in the play, indirectly.

It occurred to me that the play could accommodate extra "customers," and that these customers could do what real customers often do: read!

We obtained some chairs for our waiting room, turned sturdy cardboard cartons upside down for use as end tables, and gathered books and magazines. These provisions accommodated the extra children beautifully.

Children often spent long periods of time looking at the books and magazines, while waiting for their "appointments." Sometimes, I joined them in the area and read stories, or talked with them about the pictures. And sometimes, too, we just sat and talked to each other about what we had done the night before or over the weekend, or about a new pet, or the scratch that was healing under a bandaid, or the kind of hairstyle we thought we'd ask for.

These times turned out to be some of the best for talking with the children. In a way, the constant activity so natural in a preschool classroom paused in this particular spot when children, pretending to be customers, waited for their appointments in the shops. There was a calmness that emerged here because it fit in with their play.

SETTING IV

FIRE STATION PLAY

Materials Commonly Provided for Fire Station Play

1. Climbing box or building blocks to use in creating a fire station.
2. Firefighter hats.
3. Old shirts to use for firefighters' jackets. Old galoshes to use as firefighters' boots.
4. Small lengths of old garden hose to use as water hoses.
5. A bell to use as a fire alarm.
6. Portable ladders to use in rescue operations. (Use only where safe. Ladders are safe to use with a climbing box, but not safe to use with blocks).
7. Stretchers made from broom handles and canvas for children to use in rescue missions.
8. Old flashlights to use in search operations.
9. A telephone.

Suggestions for Using Symbolic Props in Fire Station Play.

1. Make, or help the children make a sign that says FIRE STATION. Leave it in the area where fire station play usually develops. Children can use the sign to label a climbing box or a block building.
2. Place books for fire fighters to read in their "off-duty hours" in the fire station area.
3. Place games for firefighters to play in their "off-duty hours" in the fire station area.
4. Make very simple maps of the room with areas labeled. Firefighters can use these maps to locate fires in the room.
5. Make a book with tagboard pages. Label pages with titles such as FALSE ALARMS, RESCUE MISSIONS, and REAL FIRES. This book can be used to log the firefighters' activities.

6. Post picture posters related to fire prevention on the walls of the fire station. For example, there are posters available about the dangers of playing with matches, or of not putting out a campfire, etc.

7. Make road signs for the "street" in front of the fire station. They might say, NO PARKING IN FIRE LANE, or DO NOT BLOCK DRIVE-WAY.

Fire Station Play Anecdotes from Teachers

1. Our enthusiastic firefighters created some problems. Children playing in the house, for example, complained about the numerous intrusions by firefighters who put out fires that the householders claimed were not even present.

   The children who played firefighter had a very action-oriented view of a firefighter's job. I thought that if their view could be broadened, they might carry on more activities within the "fire station," thus eliminating some of the conflicts they were having with other children.

   I arranged a trip to a fire station for a small group. In my preliminary discussions with the Fire Chief, I explained that the children seemed to know a lot about what firefighters do away from the fire station, but relatively little about what firefighters do at the fire station. I'm not sure my judgment was accurate; perhaps children just liked the outside activities better, and therefore, played them more often. In any case, I thought that if the firefighters could stress the fire station activities, perhaps children would be more familiar with them, value them more, and thus, incorporate them into their play.

   The visit was great. The children found out that fire-fighting equipment must be kept clean and in good working order, and that firefighters have to practice using some kinds of equipment

so they will know just how to use it in case of a real fire. They found out, too, that sometimes firefighters go out, thinking there is a fire, but find instead, that it is a false alarm. This last bit of information served us well in the days ahead: it permitted the firefighters to play and yet not intrude on children who did not want to be interrupted. Children playing house, for example, learned to say "False Alarm" to fire fighters they did not want to enter their house. And the fire fighters accepted this most of the time, as if this, too, was all part of a day's work. The log book had more checks on the False Alarm page than on any other!

I took the log book to our group discussion time on some days. We counted the number of Real Fires, False Alarms, and Rescue Missions, and discussed the details of some of these. The children knew from their visit to the fire station that real fire stations receive many false alarms, too, and we talked about why this might happen.

"What would you do if you saw a lot of smoke down the street?" We agreed that we would call the fire department, even though it might be something harmless that was already being watched. It's better to be prepared, we said.

"What would you do if there was just a small fire in your house?" We agreed that we would go to a neighbor's house to call the fire department for this, too, because people should not try to fight fires by themselves.

We concluded, and I think the children really understood, that false alarms are ordinary events in a fire fighter's job because people must call the fire department before being absolutely certain sometimes about whether they will really be needed.

SETTING V

DOCTOR'S OFFICE PLAY

Materials Commonly Provided for Doctor's Office Play

1. Old, white shirts and blouses for use as doctor and nurse dress-up clothes.
2. Medical props such as stethoscopes, popsicle sticks or straws (thermometers), strips of white fabric (bandages), plastic syringes, cotton balls, and old flashlights.
3. A telephone.
4. Dolls and dolls' clothes.
5. Dress-up clothes in house area so that children can dress-up to go to the doctor's office.

Suggestions for Using Symbolic Props in Doctor's Office Play

1. Make DOCTOR IS IN and DOCTOR IS OUT signs for children to use as props in their play.
2. Make an appointment book for the "receptionist" to use in the office play. Children's names can be written in the book.
3. Post an alphabet letter chart on the wall of the office. This can be used by the doctor to check the patients' eyes.
4. Use ditto masters to prepare prescription forms for doctors to give to patients. The forms might look like this:

name_____

medicine_____

doctor_____

5. Provide pencils for both the doctor and the receptionist.

6. Place books and games in the "waiting room" for patients who must wait to see the doctor.

7. Prepare simple health check-up forms for the doctor and nurse to use in their play. The forms might look like this:

Name_____
Heart
Eyes
Throat
Ears

Doctor's Office Play Anecdotes from Teachers

1. When the office was set-up, I helped children who were interested label a manilla folder for each child. We placed a Health Check-Up Form in each folder and placed them altogether in a suitable cardboard carton labeled: Health Records. The idea, of course, was that children could use these when playing doctor and nurse.

   The health record folders sat virtually untouched for the first few days the doctor's office was set-up. Children were much more interested in playing with the stethoscope, the medical scales, the flashlights and the empty syringes. There was no doubt that these props were more action-oriented, and perhaps, therefore, more interesting to the children than the health records, but I wondered if there was a difference in familiarity too. The other props were things that children came in direct contact with when visiting the doctor; the health records were different in this respect.

   It occurred to me that we had a health record on file in the school for each child. Health exams were a requirement for school entrance. We took a few children at a time for a trip to the office to look at their health forms. The children were surprised and pleased to find a folder with their names on it in the file cabinet, and each one was interested in having us read what the doctor had written on his or her health form.

These trips provided wonderful opportunities for talking with the children. "How did the doctor find out if your throat was okay? What did she use to listen to your heart? Why did he wipe your arm with something before giving a shot? How did she find out how tall you were? Why were you afraid? Why do you think your doctor had to send a copy of your health record to school?"

After this experience with their own health records, many children did incorporate the health record props in their play. Some "doctors" and "nurses" were quite meticulous in using them, letting each item listed almost dictate the sequence of their actions. Others were much more casual about it.

We had to supply the "office" with extra copies of the check-up forms because some children wanted to take their completed one with them rather than leaving it in their folder at the doctor's office. This might have been a carry-over from their knowledge that they brought a health record from their doctor to school, or it may have stemmed from what seems to me to be a rather characteristic behavior of preschool children: collecting things.

The experience with the health records made me think of a suggestion we might make to parents. Children had obviously been to a doctor for a health examination. The results of the

examination had been recorded by the doctor, and a copy had been brought to school by the children's parents; but by and large, the children were very unaware of this aspect of the experience. If parents read these records to their children, and used them to talk about the experience with the doctor, children might learn alot.

2. One day, children in the block area built "cars," and then pretended they were having crashes. Soon, there were numerous "injured" people who needed medical care, and they made their way to the doctor's office to be bandaged up.

That day, during our group discussion, I mentioned that I had noticed that the doctor's office had been a busy place due to all the accident victims. I then asked the children where people are usually taken for medical care after an automobile crash. "They are taken to the hospital," they said. I agreed that they were right, and we talked for awhile about why people are taken to a hospital rather than to a doctor's office.

At the end of our discussion, which was very short, I clipped a piece of oaktag onto the easel that I keep close-by to use when I write experience charts. I wrote HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM on the piece of oaktag, and then asked if anyone knew what it said. No one did, so I read the sign to them, and pointed out each word as I went along. I told the children I would put

the sign on the shelf near the doctor's office, and they could use it to change the doctor's office into a hospital emergency room when they needed one.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT READING AND PLAY

Question One

Are you saying that all we have to do to help children learn to read is build opportunities for reading into their play?

No, I'm not saying that dramatic play is the way to teach young children to read. Dramatic play is just one of the experiences that a good school for nursery and kindergarten children would provide. Hopefully, in addition, there would be a library corner where children could look at books and be read to by an adult. There would also be language and reading skill materials available in another area. I'm thinking of alphabet matching games, alphabet letters for magnetic and felt boards, name-card concentration, picture-word matching, etc. for such an area. Then there would be functional labels used throughout the room to indicate where things belong. I would also like to see functional signs in the classroom. For example, signs might be posted in areas to designate the number of children allowed to be there at a time, or OPEN and CLOSED signs might be used to signal when children may and may not use an area, or a QUIET PLEASE sign might be placed in the library to serve as a reminder of expectations for behavior, or a HELPERS' CHART might be used to indicate whose turn it is to water the plants or feed the animals.

I would also want children to have many opportunities for expression through creative art media, and I would hope they would have opportunities to tell about what they have made.

I would hope that sometimes what they say could be written down.

I would also hope that children would have opportunities to learn songs, nursery rhymes and finger plays.

In short, the classroom would provide many opportunities for children to build a solid basis for reading, and to actually learn to read if they are interested.

Question Two

I'm concerned about using play as a vehicle for teaching reading. I think we should allow children to play without interruption. Children deserve a childhood.

I appreciate the concern expressed in your question. You raise an important point. We should remember that if we determine children's purposes and plans, then we've destroyed children's dramatic play because it wouldn't be play any more. We need to be sure that our interventions do not have this result. On the other hand, I do not see why we should limit the range of plans that children can employ in their play. I think we do this by excluding certain kinds of props from the materials we give to children to play with. We give them blocks to build roads and buildings, but we exclude the traffic and building signs that appear on both structures in the real world. We provide dishes, dolls, and kitchen appliances, but we often exclude telephone and cook books and food cartons.

I'm afraid we have excluded certain props because we have decided that young children cannot read the symbols on them. I think we should remember that young children do not fully understand the social relationships they portray in their play, or the spatial relationships they reveal in their block buildings or paintings. We accept their approximations in these areas, and we believe that the experiences will give children a chance to learn more about these things.

I think we should provide props that include symbols, not because I expect that children will be able to read these immediately, but because I think children enjoy playing with these materials, and because I think opportunities to play with them provide opportunities to learn about them. In addition, children, in their play, try to do what they see adults do. Adults read and write. If props that support these activities are excluded, I think we are limiting children's play, not supporting it.

Question Three

All of this sounds good, but how does it really work? I can't quite imagine children making shopping lists for the grocery store just because the paper and pencils are placed in the house area!

First, I'd like to give a word of caution: Props should be viewed as possibilities, not as prescribed lessons. If a teacher places a prop in a play setting with the idea that all children will use that prop in a certain way for a certain

purpose, the teacher is in for some disappointments. We would not expect all children to dress up, or if they did, we would not expect all to like the same clothes. Similarly, not all children will use the props with symbols, and of the children who do, some will prefer some props over others.

I suspect, however, that your question was meant in a more general way. Some children do not play very well. They do not use props of any kind as part of their purposes and plans. Others may not seem to have any purposes or plans at all. It is important to consider what we might do in these situations to help children play more fully.

First, we must remember that children play what they know. They play out their experiences. A lack of diverse experiences may limit a child's play. Field trips to the post office, the grocery store, the barber shop, the dentist's office and other places of interest can help a great deal here. If possible, the children should go on field trips in small groups so that they can be involved on a personal basis with the people they visit. Visitors to the classroom can help, too, especially if they bring special equipment used in their work with them. Books and films about people and what they do can also provide the information and experience-base needed to be able to play, but these should not replace real experiences for young children.

In addition to field trips and visitors, children can be involved in many tasks related to classroom life that can

later be incorporated into their play. For example, the teacher might help children make a shopping list of ingredients she needs to buy for a cooking project to be done the next day. If possible, the children should go to the store to purchase the items. This experience might be the source of a child's idea to make a grocery list when playing house a few days later.

There are other ways to support the development of children's play besides providing first-hand experiences. A teacher can participate in the children's play, and can model certain behaviors. For example, if the teacher joins children in kitchen play, and pretend cooking develops, she or he might say, "Oh, I must go to the store to buy the eggs and milk I need to make a cake. I'd better write them down so I will remember what I need." The list would be made, and perhaps the teacher would inquire if anyone else wanted a list. If someone did, the teacher could help make it. If no one was interested, the teacher could drop it.

Sometimes it is the teacher's questions rather than teacher participation and modeling that help the children include a greater number of activities in their play. For example, if children have been playing in the house, and one child announces that she is preparing a birthday party, the teacher might ask if invitations have been sent to people to let them know about the party. If the child says "We don't need them" or "We already sent them" then you know you should drop

the idea; but if the children decide to make invitations, you are there to help.

Actual intervention in the ongoing play of children takes a great deal of skill. Suggestions should always be in keeping with the children's purposes, not the teacher's hidden agenda. When suggestions made by the teacher are consistent with children's purposes, their play can be enriched.

Question Four

You have talked about many kinds of dramatic play: house play, fire station play, store play, and doctor's office play. I can't imagine having all of these activities going on in the room simultaneously. Are you suggesting that they should be?

I guess my answer to this question is "yes," "no," and "it all depends." Typically, I would begin the year with just one play area; probably the house area because all children bring experiences to it. I would not put all of the props I have for this kind of play in the area at once. I would add items at intervals, or replace some items with others from time-to-time. All of the techniques already mentioned would be used to help children develop their play. In other words, I would use field trips, visitors, books and teacher questioning and modeling as ways to extend children's experiences with the content of the play area. It would typically take many weeks for children's play in an area to develop to a complex level. House play, for example, can be sustained and developed over a whole year if children are provided with experiences and props which

continually enrich it. After house play has been provided for a month or two, I might add fire station props to the block area to try to encourage fire station play. Again, I might not add all of the props at once, but add a few at a time over a period of weeks. And, again, many techniques would be utilized to provide children with the basic experiences from which they would learn the content for the fire station play. Still later, the fire station props might be removed from the block area, and doctor's office props might be put in their place. Props might be added gradually once again.

I would provide house play at the same time as fire station play and doctor's office play. I would do this to provide for interaction between the two kinds of play. Children can leave home to go to work at the fire station or doctor's office, or they can go to the house to fight a fire, etc.

If space allows, it would be great to provide house play, fire station play, and doctor's office play altogether, after introducing each one separately. Complex interactions among the various kinds of play can develop. Children might leave home to go to work, leave the fire station to put a fire out at the house, take an injured person to the doctor's office, and so on. Three-year-olds will not coordinate their play in this way, but many four and five-year-olds will.

In summary, then, I would not introduce all of these forms of dramatic play at the same time; but at some time, I would make

provisions so that more than one kind of play could occur simultaneously. It is important to realize that good play develops over an extended period of time, and that it does not happen all by itself. It takes planning and support from the teacher. Part of good planning involves making decisions about when to make props for various kinds of play available.

Question Five

I'm a kindergarten teacher. You seem to be trying hard to convince preschool teachers to include reading experiences in their programs. Frankly, I've always done it, but not through dramatic play or any other roundabout way. I give the children a certain amount of time to play, and then I get a certain amount of time to teach. It seems more efficient to approach reading directly, rather than to build it into other things.

It is difficult in education to establish criteria for efficiency. I guess we are being "efficient" if we spend the least amount of time to teach the most children a given amount of material.

Before I could determine if your approach is more efficient than the one I am suggesting, I would need to know exactly what you think you are teaching. Perhaps we disagree here; maybe I want different learnings, or more learnings, or learnings at a different level. For example, I'm not satisfied with mere alphabet recognition. I equate it with learning enumeration skills in mathematics. With enough repetition and drill, young children can learn to recognize numerals, match numerals with sets and count. These skills, however, are not enough to enable children to perform operations on number (e.g., addition,

subtraction, multiplication and division). Operations are dependent on broad concepts and rules such as classification, conservation and seriation. If a child cannot conserve number, then he or she has great difficulty learning addition facts, because these require that the child understand that displacement of objects in space does not change the number of objects (i.e., conservation of number). The facts for each number (e.g., 3+5=8; 6+2=8; 1+7=8; 4+4=8) are based on different arrangements of the same number of objects. An understanding of conservation is assumed, and without it, confusion reigns in the mind of the child.

The question, then, is "Do I teach enumeration to preschool and kindergarten children or not?" There is no doubt that most preschool children can and do learn to recognize numerals, match numerals and sets and count. And, these skills do not depend on, nor are they related to, conservation of number. But, unfortunately, neither are they the concepts that are required to understand operations on number. In other words, children can learn these things, and children do learn these things, but these things are not all there is to learning mathematics.

One of the ways to solve the dilemma is to teach enumeration skills in ways that also allow children to gain an understanding of the other concepts that are critical for success in mathematics.

Now, to return to the issue of reading; as I stated earlier, I am not satisfied with mere alphabet recognition and phonics skills. I want to know what the child thinks about these things, and how he or she thinks with them. I'm not sure what the equivalent to an operational level of understanding in mathematics would be in reading, but, surely, the big idea that a restricted set of letters is used to represent a restricted set of phonemes would enter into it. Reading, unlike math, is filled with exceptions to rules, and also, unlike math, one rule does not follow logically from another. Therefore, there are very big differences; but I think math and reading may be very much alike in that the intelligent manipulation of elements in each system requires something beyond mere recognition of the elements as isolated elements. It is knowledge of the patterns of relationships formed by the elements that is probably crucial.

For me, then, because of what I want children to learn, providing reading experiences through dramatic play is not inefficient. I think it is more efficient for what I want to accomplish than the approach you suggest. I should point out, however, that I think it makes perfectly good sense to also provide instruction for individual children and small groups of children that focuses on skills. But I wouldn't see this kind of instruction as the "core" of the reading instruction that I would provide for preschoolers, and I wouldn't view time spent in this way as "my" time as opposed to "their" time. Rather, I would consider both times to be

"our" times, together, and I would feel just as responsible for providing opportunities for learning at one time as the other.

One of the reasons why direct-instruction programs are sometimes viewed as more efficient than play programs, is that research comparing play programs with more structured programs has often shown them to be somewhat less effective, particularly in the short run, in promoting achievement in certain academic areas. We need to be careful, though, in interpretting this research. In many cases, the methods of teaching the same content were not always what was being compared. Play programs did not always contain some aspects of the content that were present in the structured programs. Obviously, children won't learn anything (i.e., any of those things that are unique to reading and writing as opposed to language or general concepts that certainly influence reading a great deal) about reading and writing through play if none of the materials they are given to play with are related to reading and writing. Therefore, the conclusions of this research often do not provide a good basis for concluding that structured programs are more efficient than play programs in teaching academic skills.

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